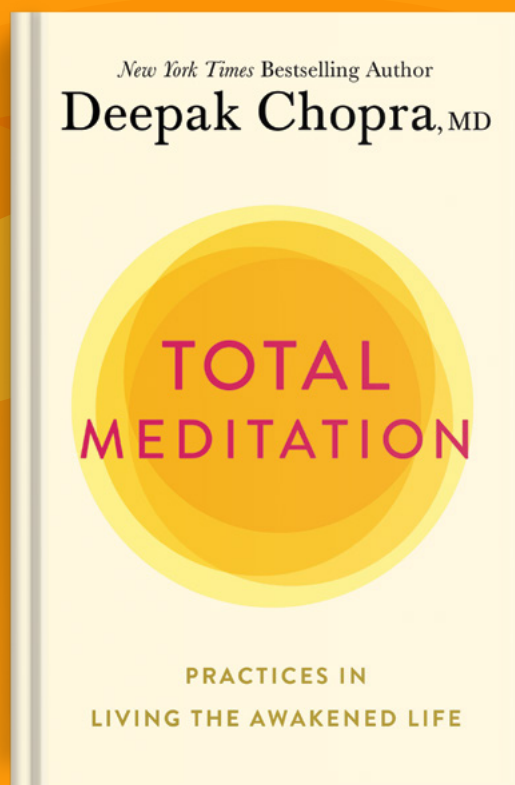


TOTAL MEDITATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH
Deepak Chopra, MD



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HARMONY
BOOKS

For the last 30 years, you have been at the forefront of the meditation revolution in the West, and have written 90 books, yet this is your first stand-alone book on the topic. Why now?

DC: I had two motivations. The first was the high dropout rate after people learn to meditate. They often don't stick with it for more than a short time. The second was the desire to find a better way to meditate so that everyone could adapt it as part of daily life.

You say that you taking up meditation in the 1980s was a turning point in your life. How so?

DC: I was a busy, overworked doctor in Boston with too much stress and not enough enjoyment in life. I knew about meditation from my childhood in India, which prompted me to try it for myself. And it worked in all the ways I wanted it to. I'd like to repeat this story in my readers' lives now.

How does the practice of “total” meditation differ from other practices of meditation?

DC: The “total” part is radically new, I think, and will make all the difference. People drop meditation mostly because they can't fit it in during a crowded day. I propose that your mind wants to be in a meditative mode naturally, and you can access it anytime you wish. No special time needs to be set aside. You simply notice when you are distracted, upset, or stressed, and—in less than a minute—you can return to a calm, centered state once more. It's very simple but also very different from how people approach meditation right now.

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh said: “Meditation is not an evasion. It is a serene encounter with reality.” Why is this so important for modern people to hear?

DC: Because it overturns what all of us were taught, that reality begins “out there” with physical objects and external events. But nothing is real unless you experience it, and experience occurs “in here,” in the domain of consciousness. Here one finds the “real” reality.

Why is understanding consciousness important to the practice of meditation?

DC: Although I wrote a whole book about it, intellectual understanding isn't necessary compared with the experience of the meditative state. Understanding gets you into the picture, so to speak, but then you have to make the picture your own, which involves actually meditating.



You say that “if it’s true that we ourselves are the source of evil, then a practical solution to evil presents itself: get unstuck.” What does getting unstuck involve and how does it make us less evil?

DC: I have felt for decades that so-called evil isn’t cosmic, and it isn’t built into human nature. We get stuck in self-defeating and destructive states for all kinds of reasons. People do bad things because they mistakenly believe in their actions and attitudes. If you unlock these underlying beliefs and attitudes, the elements of evil evaporate. We only do things we believe in, after all. Remove the belief, and the action disappears.

You observe that “for thousands of years people have gotten out of bed to pursue the same seven goals.” Can you share these goals and divulge what the key to achieving all seven of them is?

DC: All goals are achieved in three stages: first by becoming aware of them, second, by identifying with the goal as valuable, and third, by discovering that you yourself can reach that goal. All three steps are achieved in consciousness before any action is taken, which is why becoming more aware is vitally important.

Safety and security

Success and achievement

Love and belonging

Personal meaning and value

Creativity and discovery

Higher purpose and spirituality

Wholeness and unity

I think all seven are immediately understood by everyone, but what differs is how we individually interpret and carry out each goal. That’s what I try to embrace a strategy applicable to everyone in their own way.



The book contains 52 mantras that can be used as a year's course in mantra meditation. What is a mantra and what are the benefits of mantra meditation?

DC: A mantra is a word or phrase that has a meaning in Sanskrit but is primarily a tool in meditation for its frequency or vibration. By giving the mind this word or phrase to settle on, certain benefits are aimed for, such as inner peace, wisdom, and prosperity. In a more basic way, the mantra makes it easier for the mind to settle down into the state of silent awareness.

People often decrease or abandon their meditation practice during challenging times. Why is it especially important to continue to meditate through stressful situations like the one we're all experiencing with COVID-19?

DC: The answer, which has dawned on more people during this crisis, is that inner peace and calm have real value. They are not simply add-ons after you've had an exhausting day. Leaving aside the specific practice you choose, meditation has proven to be the most direct way to balance both body and mind. In a society where being in a mad rush has become the norm, meditation actually has more to offer than in a normally undisturbed setting.

What message of hope do you have for people struggling with the current challenges of the world?

DC: I say this: You cannot change what you are not aware of. Expand your awareness, and you will find that level of the mind where all solutions are found.

